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## "...Superman and the princess lived happily ever after" : on the programme of universal development of socially maladjusted youth

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## “...SUPERMAN AND THE PRINCESS LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER”. ON THE PROGRAMME OF UNIVERSAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALLY MALADJUSTED YOUTH

### ABSTRACT

Among a whole range of offers of re-education available at the international market certain gaps exist, leading to the limitation of the effectiveness of the return of maladjusted persons to society. The present article includes a suggestion of individual re-education programme of youth as well as life skills development allowing for effective functioning according to correct social roles. Perhaps, due to its comprehensive character, the present suggestion will serve to complement the formerly neglected areas of interaction.

**Key words:** inner resources, social competence, social role, comprehensive development, re-education.

The times when aggression was considered as a predominantly male trait are over. Women are more and more frequently the originators of acts of vandalism. Anger, impulsiveness, superficiality of emotions and actions are increasingly manifest in the profile of contemporary representatives of the fair sex. It might be an incorrect interpretation of the idea of emancipation and empowerment of women taking control and becoming equal to men in (unfortunately) all aspects. The influence of this tendency that has for a long time been developing within Western culture is, unfortunately, increasingly present among Polish women.

British and American experience shows alternative ways of combating the destructive comportment among women, as well, while addressing their biological conditioning, psychosocial traits, traditional and cultural roles and functions by proposing experimental schools of “good manners”. Under the supervision of governesses, girls with initiating criminal experience or displaying extreme behavioural disorders learn the etiquette of the true lady. The aim of the experiment is not to “produce” prudish women in decent suits; it is an attempt at shaping a correct attitude towards social norms and values, as well as the teaching of responsibility and refinement, presented in a media version suitable to the populist lifestyle of Americans. Reality shows such as *Ladette to Lady* (UK, 2005) or *The Girls of Hedsor Hall*, recently available also on Polish TV channels (in Polish language version, as *Damą być*), may serve as examples of such experiments.

The media success of the experiment most probably will not lead to great educational results; however, it directs public attention to the increasing problem of demoralisation among girls. It may have also been an inspiration for the authors of the Polish *Księżniczka* (*Princess*) experiment conducted among the maladjusted students of *Młodzieżowy Ośrodek Wychowawczy (MOW) w Bytomiu* (*Special School for Juveniles in Bytom*).

A girl evincing the will to come to the bright side of life (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 25), to break the ties with pathological environment and to reconstruct the immediate family environment according to socially accepted norms and common values may become a “princess”. However, it is not easy to move up to the “princess” group. It consists of strong and determined students who, having made the decision to change, take up the responsibility for their own future. According to the salutogenic approach of Aaron Antonovsky they construct the entirety of interactions, set personal goals and form personal expectations, and outline a proposed lifestyle, the achieving of which it to be attempted with utmost determination and awareness. In case of difficulties or moments of doubt the “educational contract” can be addressed, with its provisions of *Individual Re-education Programme*, the rights and the responsibilities, as well as the motivational reasons for the attempted change.

The aims of the experiment are as follows:

- definition of the individual educational interaction plan with consideration for educational needs and potential;
- learning to set short-term and long-term goals and realise them in cooperation with a friendly teacher/patron or other students;
- revaluation of the “second life”;
- improving the value of relations: teachers – students, students – students, students – environment (local<sup>1</sup> and family);
- improving the quality of cooperation with the family: supporting the education process, organisation of conditions sufficient to allow the child to live again at home;
- creating a correct perception of authority;
- developing interpersonal skills (teamwork, realising one’s needs in socially acceptable ways, coping with stress, conflict solving and dealing with difficulties), constructive personality traits such as coherence, assertiveness, flexibility, and constructing an adequate self-image;
- developing self-awareness and the learning of effective methods of self-perception;
- seeking opportunities for self-development: organising of new social, family, and cultural experiences;
- creating an individual “lifestyle plan” based on the preferences of the student and social norms;
- integration with society: education in local schools;
- developing practical skills necessary for the functioning in economic and social environment;
- enhancing the awareness of the rules of functioning in a society and in the economy – coming into one’s own, learning to respect the norms;
- promoting the help and self-help based educational model;
- learning to make gains rationally and with consideration of the cost of one’s

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<sup>1</sup> Local environment typical of the location of the special school, which is usually to be found near the student’s family home. It is to improve the image of the student, who is perceived as “corrupt” by the local population.

own initiative: learning to take responsibility, predicting the consequences of one's actions, decision-making skills and creating a balance of profits and losses concordant with legal and social norms (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, pp. 25-29).

What is most interesting is that the aforementioned aims are achieved with the help of a whole branch of forms and tools, which provide the experiment with the character of a broader construct in the form of an eclectic system of re-education. One may notice the elements of the disciplinary system, as reflected in the isolating character of the institution; the progressive system: moving up to the "princess" group, the privileges for beginners as well as for the deserving along with the progressive character of the implementation of educational contracts; the socio-pedagogical system: democratic method of group inclusion and a team responsibility for the realisation of main group tasks, e.g. through the privileges and care for all new students; the individual system: through the creation of individual programmes of re-educational interaction and signing educational contracts including the set of responsibilities devised specifically for each individual student (tailored to the abilities of the student as well as the institution and to the personal expectations as to the process of change), along with the plan of personal lifestyle based on one's vision of the future, the preferences and the "predispositions"<sup>2</sup> of the student; the heterogeneous system: placing the girls in groups according to their age and "initiation" into the experiment. It is practically implemented through self-education and the care of the girls "at home" over the beginner "princesses".

When looking at the structure of the experiment of Aleksander Mańka and Tomasz Polkowski one can notice a constellation of individual elements coming into certain conjunctions and engagements to create a self-propelling machine of personality change and personal development of maladjusted students.

One of such elements is the *Individual Interaction Programme* (IIP) "tailored" for and by the student. Its construction process is based upon feedback from teachers who, through appropriate empowerment, lead the author to a final result fulfilling the formal requirements and actually contributing to the girls' re-education (they guard the document structure, the measuring of effects, the verification, the practicability and adequacy of the goals, etc.). The authors have proposed certain stages of its implementation: 1. introductory diagnosis (getting to know oneself – differentiating between the real self and the imaginary self, in the context of individual experience and skills); 2. constructing individual change expectations (short- and long-term practicable goals); 3. setting the stages with emphasis on detailed goals; 4. declaring the ways to achieve the goals (as set down in the written version of the educational contract as the responsibilities of both sides); 5. constructing individual development model with the account of individual traits, such as: interpersonal skills (especially those crucial in family life), behaviour (especially those related to reactions adequate to situations as well as the modifications of the formerly acquired incorrect reaction models), individual resources and the

<sup>2</sup> Understood as the entirety of the girls' biological, psychological, and social traits, i.e. the entirety of their individual resources.

use thereof, individual model of the future (dreams, ideas, plans, ambitions, ways of valuation), models and preferences (general expectations, e.g. the models of family, partners, work), practical skills connected with economy and everyday life (self-reliance, cultural life, awareness of norms, dealing with contracts – usually consumer-related) (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 28).

The IIP is reinforced by interpersonal training and competence workshops providing the opportunity to learn basic economic and social skills. The students learn how to manage a household, pay the bills, do shopping sensibly, cook, take care of personal hygiene and take sufficient care of other household members. The achieving of these goals allows for the organisation of the girls' life in a detached part of the institution with a separate entrance from the street, where the girls are provided with the opportunity to cope with real-life problems<sup>3</sup>. Further, social skills training supplementing the preparations for self-reliance with self-perception and independence. It is achieved thanks to the development of individual resources, such as: coherence, flexibility, grit, optimism, sense of humour, learning of methods of self-perception and constructing a positive self-image, knowledge and practical skills for solving everyday life problems, decision making, problem solving, cooperation in respecting individuality, realising one's needs in socially acceptable ways, planning, and consistency in achieving short- and long-term goals.

Achieving the entirety of the aforementioned competences appears to be a utopian vision, unfeasible for a socially functional individual within the intellectual norm, let alone for a socially maladjusted girl coming from a pathological environment. That is, however, an example of stereotypical, conventional thinking. The programme is not aimed at creating a "perfect human being", but at improving the functioning of a young person that has been deprived of the opportunity of normal (in the common understanding: normalised, average, casual) life. If, therefore, that person is successfully "supplied" with a resource that makes life easier, it is a unique achievement.

*Patronage* constitutes yet another means of making comprehensive help (not education, for it does not include personal development, in view of scholarly terminology) possible. It is not an innovative solution; however, combined with its actual goals, such as – achieving self-reliance, making autonomous decisions, taking responsibility for one's behaviour and even preparation for self-education and educating the environment – it receives a new meaning. Patronage becomes something more; a "pupil-trusted teacher" relationship, guide, confidant, comrade, friend" one (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 29). The teacher through introducing the girl to her family life<sup>4</sup> shows her correct models of interpersonal relations, exemplifying the axioms and norms introduced during the re-education process. It proves to the student that good, love, mutual respect within a household, school or in relations of social distance – in the streets, in

<sup>3</sup> The organisation of the life of students of a re-educational institution in a self-reliant way as a form of adaptation to the conditions of independent living was implemented as soon as the XIX century by Walter Crofton as a realisation of the idea of progressivism.

<sup>4</sup> Patronage is often combined with the functioning of *friend families*, which constitutes the teacher's family. In other cases it is the members of the girl's extended family who display no disorders (they realise their social and family functions correctly, do not have pathological traits and are free of the influence of such environments, have no criminal record) or willing families from the immediate environment of the institution (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 29).

government institutions – actually exist. By inclusion in the structure of the teacher’s own private life a girl is allowed to partially experience positive emotions and give everyday situations a try. Learning through experience, situational methods supplemented by advice and individual influence of the teacher complements the deep life attitude change (through modification of all three components: perceptive, emotional and behavioural). If the pupil-patron relationship takes place on the level of the “I-Thou” relationship (as coined by Martin Buber) mutual respect may be built<sup>5</sup>. The teacher becomes a mentor, whose words and actions are not only worthy of hearing/observation, but also imitation; the student becomes a value, a uniqueness, an individuality, in the eyes of the partner and her own. Upon this relationship an adequate self-image is constructed; the image of oneself is enriched with the values that were formerly unnoticed due to the lack of knowledge or self-perception skills. Constructing a firm basis of an identity of a valuable, self-reliant (competences workshops are employed simultaneously) person provides awareness of the need for sharing one’s individual resources (knowledge, positive emotions, skills) within the local environment, most often through volunteer community service.

Volunteering as practised in Poland is comparatively underdeveloped as a means of re-education of the socially maladjusted. This may be a result of the difficulties with changing the social perception of the juveniles as unchangeably “corrupt” and “spoilt”, with the need to isolate them from “normal” people. Numerous public opinion surveys clearly indicate that Polish citizens favour sufficient, i.e. severe punishment, preferably in the form of imprisonment or the death penalty, which supports the aforementioned thesis (Węgliński, 2006, p. 29). The authors of the *Princess* experiment emphasise the educational character of voluntary work as well as substantial positive personality changes connected with it. The students of the Bytom Special School devote their time in the evenings to providing help to nursing homes, hospitals, kindergartens and the handicapped, which allows them to learn empathy and to care for others (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, pp. 26, 29). Frequently their very presence, the time devoted, or just a smile bring relief to the needy. It constitutes a great lesson of responsibility and perseverance in spite of difficulties and temptations. Apart from the value of the actual work done to help the staff of the institutions, the feedback that the girls receive constitutes an advantage of volunteering. They suddenly become Someone important, unique and needed; *Someone* who is awaited and without whom the day seems pointless. Such information provides a basis for the girls’ positive self-esteem. Formerly they knew only scorn, invectives and harmful labelling that have become an integral part of the structure of their identity, leading to socially unacceptable behaviour, which met the expectations of the environment<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the reconstruction of the girls’ “self” leading to internal crises and, as a result, firm decisions to change the lifestyle, reinforced by constant social empowerment (with the help of the families, institutions, teachers, the local community) lead to successful re-education. Furthermore, the perception of the “maladjusted” is changing. They are no longer “corrupt”; they “nor-

<sup>5</sup> The *therapeutical interactions* taking place at this level are realised simultaneously by specialists providing professional psychological supervision.

<sup>6</sup> The described mechanism of *self-fulfilling prophecy* has been elaborated upon by Howard S. Becker (Siemaszko 1993, p. 317).

mally" coexist with other citizens. Not only is their social position optimised – they also rise up to the role of "positive deviants"<sup>7</sup>, devoting their lives to helping others.

The girls provide voluntary work for their own environment, as well. Having reached a sufficiently advanced level of the programme they are given opportunity to take care of their younger siblings or peers remaining in their former place of residence (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 26). This allows for a broadening of the re-educational activity from individual to local. With the hands of the students help is provided to the local and family environment, without the need for additional funding or staff. The economic aspect is of crucial significance here, constituting the need for similar initiatives. In this way the work on personal development of the girls is continued, in order to realise another level of interpersonal skills training – by transferring the acquired knowledge/competence to real life situations<sup>8</sup>, they train the acquiring and preserving of social skills, while improving self-esteem through their achievement.

Out of the numerous means constituting comprehensive re-education through the *Princess* experiment the presence of rituals in the lives of the students of the institution, allowing for a feeling of security and the learning of respect for norms and functioning within certain boundaries, paid work shaping a correct attitude towards the value of work itself, respecting property and the value of money, studying in local schools allowing for the preservation of contact with peers with no pathological background and the changing of public perception of the students of re-educational institutions, as well as the theme of the "Nothing for free" programme helping to prevent acquired helplessness and demanding attitude – elements so common within the structure of pathological environments – need to be emphasized (Mańka, Polkowski 1998, p. 29).

It may seem that all means available to the authors have been exhausted; Tadeusz Wolan, however, suggests broadening the interaction reach through the following solutions:

- constructing an analogous programme aimed at boys – name e.g. "Champion";
- establishing a consultation and analysis point to deal with researching the effects of the programme, data analysis and conceptualisation of conclusions, supervision of the programme staff and monitoring, proposing modifications and programme construction;
- establishing a local commission bureau dealing with the transposition of interactions to the families and local communities of the students. Its staff would assist the family throughout the re-education process and coordinate the preventive actions;
- improving the conditions for students' self-reliance in the hygiene department by providing their lodgings with home appliances such as e.g.

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<sup>7</sup> The phenomenon of positive deviancy is analyzed by Jerzy Kwaśniewski, Andrzej Kojder (see: Siemaszko 1993, pp. 324- 326).

<sup>8</sup> In the *structured learning model* Arnold Goldstein described the levels of competence acquisition: 1. modelling the actions through e.g. observation, 2. trying out the actions through "role-play", 3. feedback, i.e. altering the achieved results, 4. transferring (transposition) and consolidating the results of the acquired skill (Pospiszyl 1998, pp. 126-128).

washing machines as well as separate meters which would allow the girls to learn to pay their own bills and, in my opinion, to save money and use resources rationally;

- the last idea, which I strongly support, is the organising of proper dormitory structure, allowing for lodging in separate rooms, connected to the institution building, but with separate entrance (Wolan 2011, pp. 115-117).

It is my opinion that this idea calls for a special development similar to German social housing, where maladjusted juveniles (and adults) acquire competences to run a household. Under the supervision of a social worker (assistant) they learn to plan monthly expenditures, do the shopping, pay the bills, independently deal with the state administration in order to receive their own welfare, compile personal documents and, last but not least, find a job securing a decent living standard. The homogeneous combination of the inhabitants of a multi-room flat or an entire block of flats allows for the establishing of support and self-help groups, which is manifest not only in practical advice of the more experienced tenants, but, first and foremost, in motivation to solve problems and seek help that often they are not open to. The overcoming of "social phobias" constituting the basis of social exclusion in such organised conditions is only a question of time. If we are, therefore, to help the girls become self-reliant and prepare them to correctly fulfil social roles (of mothers, housewives, citizens) it is necessary to organise their living conditions in a way allowing for education through experience.

An idea for further minimizing of the laboratory-like conditions that are connected to the all-female company is combining the experiment with the simultaneously conducted "Champion" programme. Supplementing the living conditions with the masculine element makes them more like real life along with allowing for a correct distribution of functions and responsibilities, an observation of correct male and female models and developing intersexual communication skills (often lacking due to pathological socialisation)<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, learning from the experience of the education system that has been implementing the coeducational school and class system for years due to its increased effectiveness<sup>10</sup> in comparison to its homogenous counterpart. Certainly, the negative implications of the coeducational character of the group along with increased opportunity for sexual contacts (forced sexual initiations and pregnancies of emotionally immature juveniles unprepared for parenthood) should not be underestimated. However, such risk is typical of the open character of the institution, which allows for maintaining social relationships with peers at school or during extracurricular activities.

Establishing of a programme aimed at girls is something new on the re-educational market. It is most probably related to a dynamically developing tendency - namely, an increase in criminal activity among girls and women, originating in emancipation and feminism. Formerly, the percentage of female inmates was

<sup>9</sup> The most common symptoms are behavioural disorders, i.e. premature sexual activity, paraphilia, phobias and withdrawal from interactions, inability to initiate and maintain relationships, lying, truancy, etc. (Ostaszewski 2005, p. 112)

<sup>10</sup> The correlation results from mutual encouragement and constructive competition based on intersexual fondness and sociometric relationships.



much lower, to the extent that women were not included in research as an insufficient sample group – statistically irrelevant. This disgraceful female activity, with the awareness of the possibility of matching the men, must be stopped. To prevent a snowball effect such programmes must still be conducted; sufficient research means must be constructed; the data must be analysed and preventive actions undertaken. Not only at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> levels (after diagnosing behavioural disorders), but also much earlier, starting with mass prevention (before criminal initiation). These may be easily realised in kindergartens with support of the parents who will implement the introduced solutions at home. While we cannot expect an effective change in the aggressive behaviour of young mothers in the near future, reaching their daughters at the kindergartens provides a practical chance of protecting their granddaughters.

Coming back to the idea of re-education – males still dominate on the “criminal market”, that is why an effective programme aimed at them should be introduced. It could be named “Champion”, as proposed by T. Wolan (Wolan 2011, p. 115), or *hero, real man, superman*, which, in my opinion, boys would find most to their liking. Constructing an analogous system will allow not only for the re-education of juveniles to an optimal level (socially required), but will also provide a chance for improving their social position. The idea is to make them more attractive as men: “a catch”, “good future husband/son-in-law”, “good master of the house/employee”, “gentleman”<sup>11</sup> – who nowadays are few and far between. Proper education and acquiring practical skills may allow the boys to start a family with women with no similar (dysfunctional) background and prevent deviant cultural transmission (as corroborated by the theories of Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay)<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, such preparation would call for a “here and now” perspective, rather than a discriminating judgement based on background or past problems. What parent would not want a loving, enterprising husband for his/her daughter and what employer would not want a well-mannered and competent employee who, when faced with difficulties, will work hard to overcome them?

In relation to the above, let me propose a few ideas that should be considered when constructing a programme for boys:

- Voluntary work: apart from accompanying girls in elderly homes – some physical labour, e.g. loading coal, shopping, chopping wood, major repairs, renovations, house repairs (electric installation, hammering nails, etc.);
- Lodgings (flats at the institution/annexe with separate entrance): men only or coeducational<sup>13</sup>. As I have mentioned before, the presence of women has a pacifying effect and motivates to consistently implement gentlemanly manners; the girls would also teach thriftiness, order, cooking, sewing on buttons and ironing shirts;
- Developing “manly interests”: driver’s license courses, workshops, cars (not only enhancing knowledge, but also workshop activities, e.g. disassembling

<sup>11</sup> The strategy was implemented in Dutch juvenile halls in the XVI century (Dukaczewski 2007, p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> The theories described in: Siemaszko 1993, pp. 73-74.

<sup>13</sup> Coeducational flats for boys representing a sufficient level of maturity and responsibility (for themselves and their actions), i.e. the most advanced in the programme.

car engines and providing real life contact: observation/participation in go-kart racing and speedway). Here the boys' individual interests should be taken into account, regardless of the topic. Tourism, painting and even embroidery allow for personal development undertaken under own initiative, learning manners and reliability, consistency in achieving goals and constructive leisure time activities. Preoccupation – as described by Travis Hirschy (Siemiaszko 1993, pp. 239-242) – a factor preventing deviant behaviour by taking up most of the students time constitutes yet another advantage of realising personal interests in the process of re-education. We must bear in mind that a part of criminal activity is related to boredom;

- Sport: football teams, jogging (intensive evening practice relieving the energy surplus before bedtime), occasionally – survival skills practice (as a source of constructive adrenaline, allowing for stress/aggression relief leading to calmness in interpersonal relationships, quiet in the flat, settling conflicts, preventing acts of vandalism in the neighbourhood, etc.). Elements of survival skills practiced in harsh natural conditions and sport competitions based on fair play allow for additional personality shaping, teach fortitude and develop peer relations. It is a great means in the hands of the teacher, who is able to properly form the sociometric status of individual students;
- Technical training: carpenter, electrician, painter, etc. The aim of the workshops is not to return to traditional social roles – they are an attempt at combating the tendency of contemporary men towards acquired helplessness. Technological progress and increased living standards (access to expensive equipment, low prices) has freed men of the responsibility for home appliances. Fixing broken equipment has become uneconomical, hence the adaptive loss of such skills;
- Interpersonal skills training aimed at forming pro-social and pro-family attitude, further presentation of the correct role of the man as the father, son, brother, PARTNER, learning to name (verbalise) and show emotions and feelings; learning responsibility, planning, constructive (instead of aggressive) conflict solving as well as decision making skills that most men lose due to the aforementioned tendency towards acquired helplessness. The competence workshops should be supplemented with “Gentleman ABC” training related to manners, hygiene, and image;
- Career planning with practical CV writing skills, looking for a job and job interviews.

The basic interactions of the female programme are: improving family relations and contact with friend families, patronage and therapy. All the elements are aimed at compensating emotional deficiencies and personal development allowing for a return to society with the correct attitude and hierarchy of values. Preparation for fulfilling socially accepted roles as well as modelling “manly” models is also possible through meeting with famous sportsmen, politicians, actors, etc. This form, especially attractive to boys, certainly preceded by choosing a correct model (e.g. by analysing the biography in relation to the attitude towards the law,

women, culture, etc.) may lead to the experience of internal crisis, self-diagnosis, and motivation to change.

The presented elements of the programme are combined in a completely complementary way (in view of both sociology and psychology) yet in an unconventional form, innovative at the European and perhaps even at the world level. Even though the individual solutions are being implemented, they are realised in their basic (individual) or fragmentary form exclusively, with a one-sided effect on the development of professional or sport skills<sup>14</sup>. However, there is a lack of forms taking into account the comprehensive individual development with all its functioning aspects. The phenomenon is certainly based in the economy, with its crucial role in today's world. Due to the character of re-educational practice it ought to be considered a long-time investment, which appears to be the most economical form in times of stock market crashes and financial crises.

To summarise briefly, the functioning of maladjusted youth as well as the living standards of all of us need reflection. The terrifying outcomes of contemporary social trends lead to the devaluation of human life, with manners, tradition, axiological aspect of work, self-respect and mutual respect all but forgotten. The changing and diverse nature of post-modernity has deprived us of reference points that formerly used to define the level of humanity. Nowadays we no longer need to "become", it is enough if we "are" what we are regardless of the social consequences of our "being" – if this does not change, inevitable doom awaits our entire civilisation.

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<sup>14</sup> All world achievement in this department is related to intervention typical of the milieu therapy influence, with August Aichhorn recognised as its precursor. More information on this practice can be found in: Heede, Runge, Storebø, Rowley, Hansen 2009, including describing social development of mentally handicapped persons and persons with mental disorders, a description of mechanisms of interaction and behavioural and cognitive change; Pospiszyl K. 2000, including a description of the functioning of the Wiltwyck School proposing re-education through work and self-governed therapy communes and the Glen Mills school in Pennsylvania implementing the programme of i. a. exclusive sports (tennis, swimming, team sports) leading to social activation of maladjusted youth; Polish experiences are described in Szecówka 2009, pp. 15-24.

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